

James McBey & The Capture of Damascus



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Independent Research



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**All images and artworks displayed in this research
are works by the artist James McBey**

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Introduction

During the summer vacation of 2024, by pure coincidence, I visited the Aberdeen Art Gallery in Scotland. My wife and I strolled through the museum, enjoying the diverse and timeless artistic works on display. Yet, for some reason—perhaps out of a sense of belonging—I found myself tirelessly searching for anything connected to my city, Damascus, the oldest capital in the world. In my mind, Damascus appears as a unique and beautiful city, adorning the world with its warm radiance and ancient glory. The closer I came to finishing my tour, the more anxious I grew at the thought of finding nothing about Damascus. Perhaps it was natural, given the vast distances and remoteness—I was, after all, on the northern edge of the world. But fate whispered in my ear, urging me to keep searching until I found something to soothe my simple longing.

I was overjoyed when I came across a beautiful painting of the modern King of Syria, King Faisal I, painted in Damascus by an artist I had never heard of before, named “James McBey.” The next day, I called my father and told him about my visit to the museum and how I had found a painting of King Faisal I. He grew excited and told me it was an extremely rare piece of art, encouraging me to look for more pictures or paintings related to Damascus. My father, who has an unmatched passion for research and history, is a true his-

torian and a professor specializing in Arab and Islamic history. That day, he urged me to collect as many images as I could, hoping they might be published later. I've never been one to refuse my father's requests, and I couldn't find a way to escape this seemingly tedious task that had fallen upon me during my blissful summer vacation in the serene paradise gardens of Scotland, with its tranquil and chilly atmosphere. Historical research was not my field of expertise and far from my interests. However, with some begrudging effort, I conducted a quick search using the digital archive provided by the Aberdeen Museum. There, I found numerous photographs taken by the same artist, James McBey, whose painting had initially captured my attention, though I still knew nothing about him.

To my surprise, I began to find a new joy in historical research. Slowly, the idea for a research project started forming in my mind. I realized that if I were to collect these images, they would need some explanation and context, even if brief and highly concise. After some time, I contacted my father and my brother Muawiya, who has a deep passion for history and its study. I sought their help to obtain the names of some historical sources under the pretense of curiosity. No one knew my intention, goal, or the purpose of my research, which I kept secret until the very end, except for my wife. She encouraged me to continue and provided valuable insights with her extensive expertise in academic research.

After weeks of continuous research and adequate preparation, I compiled a specific list and contacted the museum to arrange a visit to examine some intriguing archived documents and texts related to my project. The visit was scheduled at a place called the "Aberdeen Treasure Hub," which truly lived up to its name, housing historical treasures forgotten by the world. The museum staff awaited me, brimming with kindness and extraordinary hospitality. They had prepared a research room for me equipped with the necessary tools and all the materials I had requested. I spent the following hours meticulously examining those texts, filled with the exhilaration of discovery and inquiry.

After months of studying historical references in Arabic, English, Turkish, Ottoman, and French, and after an arduous and challenging journey constrained by my limited abilities and scarce time, I completed this humble research in its current form. I focused on a concise narrative of the historical information about Damascus during the reign of King Faisal between 1918 and 1920, supported by photographs and artwork by the World War I artist, James McBey, which also pertain to Damascus. My aim with this research is to briefly share the intriguing and captivating story of James McBey and showcase his works related to the capture of Damascus. Accompanying this is a historical summary of the events from a nationalist perspective. I hope this work will be well-received and appreciated.

The Author



King Faisal I ^[1]

“ To founder quickly on the high seas, a better fate than to decay
slowly in harbour^[2] ”

James McBey

Chapter One

James McBey ^[1]

James McBey born out of wedlock on January 23, 1883, near the village of Newburgh, north of the city of Aberdeen. His father, James Willey McBey (1852 - 1927), was a farmer, and his mother Annie Gillespie (1861 - 1906) was living with her parents. His father left the village for Warlingham (Surrey suburbs) after several years, where he bought a farm and worked on it. James only saw his father once in his childhood and lived with his mother and his grandfather, the village blacksmith, until his grandfather passed away when James was four years old. After that, he and his mother and grandmother moved to a humble residence, living a poor, isolated, and austere life.

Despite his shyness, at the age of nine or ten, he decided to participate in a drawing competition at the village flower show sponsored by the village grocer, Willie Murray, to draw the nearby "Knockhall Castle" He won the competition and received a sum of money along with praise and encouragement from the village elites. At the age of twelve, he was selected as his school's representative in geography to compete against other schools. He won the competition and received a significant sum of money, which he used to hire a bicycle and travel from his village to the city of Aberdeen, where he bought some oil paints and tasted bananas and tomatoes for the first time in his life. He liked bananas but disliked tomatoes.

At fourteen, during a casual visit by a family friend, a banker named James H. Brown, he was offered a chance to sit for the entrance examination to one of the banks in Aberdeen. He accepted, and his mother sent him there. She followed with his grandmother, and they all rented an apartment in "42 Union Grove" in Aberdeen. He began his paid apprenticeship at the bank in March 1899 when he was fifteen years old.

Despite his work at the bank, he secretly pursued painting and made it his obsession in his spare time. He practiced before and after work, studying the arts, reading articles and books, and finished hundreds of books on painting and fine arts from the Aberdeen library. He memorized the names of contemporary artists and their paintings, trying to understand their techniques in drawing, lighting, and coloring. He joined an evening art school, but it quickly stopped after the death of Queen Victoria. Needing to learn some advanced painting techniques, he tried training under a local artist named John A. Hay, who quickly praised his clear-cut talent and returned his money, saying, "I can teach you nothing."

From books, he learned the art of engraving copper plates and etching. With the help of his blacksmith uncle, George Gillespie, he made a special press to assist him in printing his etchings, as Aberdeen lacked a printing press for copper-engraved plates at the time. Inspired by the works of artist James A. McNeill Whistler, he began buying old paper for printing, as it would become softer and silkier over time. Even after his later success, he continued to buy old paper and made his etchings and printed them himself.

James was intelligent, fast learner, and loved humor. He stayed in his banking job, which he disliked, for about eleven years, and was promoted every year. Despite his unique artistic talent, from which he earned some money through modest and limited attempts at painting, Art wise, his environment was not vast, nor was his city (Aberdeen) conducive to arts. His bank job consumed most of his time from morning until evening, six days a week, without any significant financial compensation.

He loved his grandmother deeply and admired her folk sayings, she greatly influenced his life. He painted her in a portrait, which was his first work in his artistic career. Everyone who knew about James's passion for painting, including friends, acquaintances, and neighbors, recognized his talent and encouraged him, except for his mother, Anne. She was harsh and critical of him throughout his life since his childhood, never showing affection, and raised him to address her as "Annie" rather than "Mom, or Mother". She would criticize his painting, seeing it as a waste of time, and insisted that he focus solely on his banking work. Despite all this, he obeyed her and tried many times to convince her that he could earn much more money through painting than from his banking job, but she either opposed or remained silent, clearly resentful of him. She seemed to view his birth as the source of her misery, as years after his birth, she suffered from eye disease and gradually lost her vision until she became completely blind. One fateful cold night, she committed suicide by hanging herself in the basement of the stone building they lived in. James did everything he could to suppress the scandal to prevent it from being published in the city newspapers, as it would harm his reputation and his family's reputation, especially since suicide was considered a grave sin in Scotland at the time, and the body of a suicide victim was not buried in Christian cemeteries. He did not feel relieved until his mother was laid to rest in consecrated soil at the churchyard of their village.

Years after his mother's suicide, his ninety-year-old grandmother moved to live with one of her children due to needing constant care. James then moved to live alone in a room in an office building in Union Street. After some time, accustomed to a life of poverty and austerity, he calculated his savings and inheritance from his mother and found enough money to live frugally for two years if he wanted to pursue art as a profession. He decided to take the risk and resigned from his job at the bank in July 1910. That same night, he traveled to the Netherlands to focus on painting, enduring great physical challenges and difficulties until life began to smile upon him gradually, and his career began to flourish. He traveled through Europe and first visited Morocco in 1912, where he was fascinated by the country and its people. He stayed as a guest of a friend in a house called "El Foolk" in Tangiers. In 1915, he returned to Newburgh after the death of his grandmother, who he mourned deeply and described as "my only friend."

In 1916, James volunteered to join the British Army during World War I and was later appointed as a war artist on the Egyptian front. He traveled with British soldiers across the desert, fighting the Ottomans alongside the Arab rebels who had declared their Great

Arab Revolt against the Ottoman Empire after years of struggle. McBey found himself in the midst of the war, surrounded by the buzz of bullets, armed with his art supplies. He painted the faces of war and scenes of the East, entering Damascus with Arab and British forces. He met King Faisal I and painted his portrait. His works returned to Britain, including a famous painting of T.E. Lawrence, titled "Dawn, the Camel Patrol Setting Out" which became highly successful and sold for the equivalent of thousands of dollars in today's money.^[2]

After the war, he returned to Britain, where fame and wealth awaited him. He sold more of his artworks and bought a house in London. He continued to travel around Europe, painting and etching, even buying a boat to sail throughout Europe.

At that time, he had achieved such fame and success that his works were sold for exorbitant prices even before they were exhibited. He traveled to the United States twice on exploratory trips for painting and adventure. During the second trip, he met his future wife, Marguerite Loeb, with whom he fell in love. They secretly married at the beginning of 1931, then returned to London before traveling to Spain and crossing the Strait of Gibraltar into Morocco. During another visit in the spring of the following year, he bought a dilapidated house that had been built by Sharif Al-Wazzan for his English wife. In the summer of 1939, while visiting the United States, World War II broke out, and they were stranded there. James repeatedly attempted to enlist in the British Army and participate in the war, but he was rejected due to his age. He remained with his wife throughout the war years, and upon their return to Morocco, James wrote in his diary, "I am so glad that it is granted me to be here again, God, I thank you."

He remained with his wife in a house he had purchased before the war. He went through a period of stagnation, unable to paint, he began writing his life story, though he never completed it. He bought "El Foolk" the house he had fallen in love with in Morocco twenty years earlier, and restored it. He began living there and continued his nomadic lifestyle with his primary home and the bulk of his time spent at "El Foolk" in Tangiers. He passed away there in December 1959 and requested that "He loved Morocco" be written on his tombstone in Arabic. His grave is still located on the slopes of Tangiers overlooking the Strait of Gibraltar.

McBey was famous during his life, but his fame diminished after his death, and people began to forget him. His wife, who had witnessed his struggles in life, worked hard to preserve his memory and keep his name alive. Despite his difficult beginnings, his life was marked by fluctuating fortunes, with periods of hardship and prosperity. His name still battles against the annals of history, striving to remain in a prominent, shining place, ensuring that his legacy does not fade over time.

Chapter Two

Photographs of James McBey



James McBey in conversation ^[1]



James McBey with the Imperial Camel Corps ^[2]



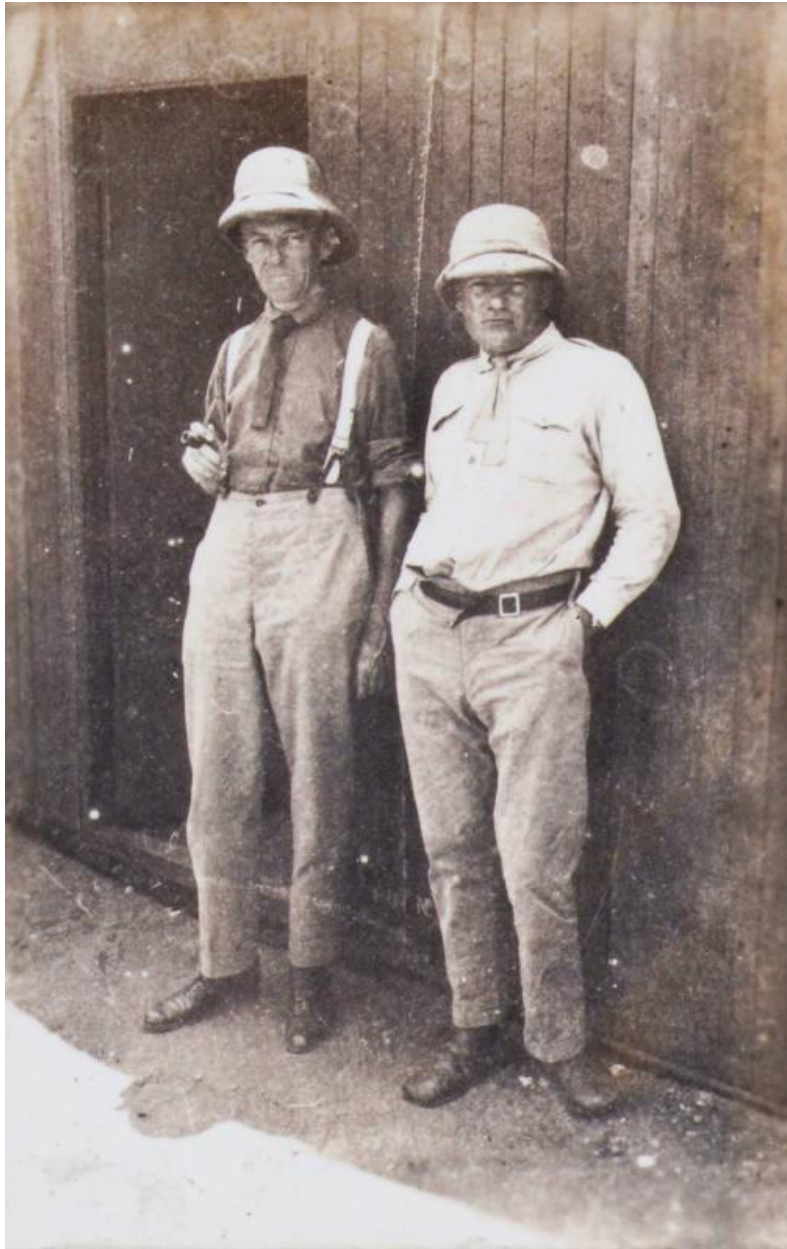
James McBey Painting in the Desert ^[3]



James McBey having tea with some soldiers ^[4]



James McBey taking a "Selfie" in Palestine ^[5]



James McBey with a soldier ^[6]



James McBey Sails back home ^[7]

Chapter Three

The Capture of Damascus

The Great Arab Revolt represents a pivotal chapter in the history of the Middle East, where political ambitions intersected with imperial conspiracies and nationalistic sentiments. This revolt was led by Sharif Hussein bin Ali, the Sharif of Mecca, against the Ottoman Empire during World War I, driven by the Arabs' desire for independence and self-determination. It was a defining moment in the history of Arab nationalism, laying the foundation for the shaping of the modern political landscape in the Arab world.

The most important causes of the Great Arab Revolt

The Spread of Nationalist Sentiment

Nationalist associations proliferated in the final decades of the Ottoman Empire's existence, driven by a rise in cultural awareness and a growing openness to Western influences.^[1] The Turks, Arabs, Greeks, Bulgarians, Albanians, Circassians, Kurds, and Armenians all had, even at the level of factions and sects, their own nationalist institutions, movements, parties, and secret organizations that remained active for decades before and after World War I. These groups sought either separation and independence or autonomy and decentralization. These nationalisms fueled one another, with the victory of one serving as a catalyst for the others.^[2]

The Preservation of the Arabic Language and Identity

Turkish was the official language of the state, and all subjects taught in the official imperial schools were conducted in Turkish.^[3] The Arabic language became relegated to a religious function, limited to the recitation of the Quran, and a colloquial language spoken by the poor in the Arab regions of the Ottoman Empire. Anyone who examines the records of the Sharia courts in Damascus during the late years of the Ottoman rule would be exhausted and weary in their attempt to decipher the symbols of that hybrid language, which had scattered fragments forming bridges between different languages. The nationalist movements that emerged were instrumental in preserving their identities. Had it not been for the inclusion of Mersin, Antioch, and Diyarbakir within modern-day Turkey, it would be hard to imagine the fate of the Arab identity under Turkish rule.

The Repression of the Unionist Government

The Unionist government (the three Pashas), which came to power through a military coup, ruled the Ottoman Empire in the last two decades of its existence without justice. They exercised power without referring to the Imperial Divan or the Caliph, effectively ruling unilaterally.^{[4] [5]} They favored The Turkish ethnicity over the other ethnicities in

the state, without equality.^[6] One of its bloodiest figures was Jamal Pasha, who wrote in his memoirs about the executions of Turks, Armenians, and Arabs that he personally ordered.^[7] The accused were tried and executed in mock courts. In addition, a systematic demographic change was carried out on the ethnic groups and inhabitants of the Ottoman Empire. 150,000 Armenians were forcibly displaced from Anatolia to Aleppo and Beirut under the pretext of protecting them.^[8] (a number exceeding the urban population of Jordan at the time.^[9]) Along with this, Arab families were relocated to Anatolia, their properties were confiscated, and the crops of the Levant were transported to the front-lines. Famine ensued, and young Arabs from the Levant were sent to the farthest war-fronts under the pretext of "military conscription" (Seferberlik).^{[10] [11]}

The Arabs' demands from the Unionist Government

The Arabs during World War I were a crucial key to victory for any of the warring parties. The Ottoman Empire needed to ensure the loyalty of the Arabs and use them in the war, while the British sought to neutralize the Arabs and guarantee their neutrality to ensure the success of their military campaign launched from Egypt.^[12] Meanwhile, the Arabs seized this opportunity to attain their independence and freedom.

Despite the public discontent of the Arabs, represented by Sharif Hussein, Emir of Mecca, with the war,^[13] However, this did not prevent him from initiating secret correspondence with the British to secure the future of the Arabs after the war. After months of correspondence, Sharif Hussein received satisfactory promises through the McMahon Correspondence.^[14] Following this, a telegram from the Sublime Porte in the name of the Caliph called for the declaration of jihad in Mecca and urged Arab tribes to participate in the war. In response, Sharif Hussein sent a letter demanding certain rights in exchange for the Arabs' participation in the conflict.

Historical sources differ in the exact wording of the letter, but they all agree that Sharif Hussein's demands were as follows:

- The release of political prisoners among Syrian and Arab nationalists and the annulment of their death sentences.
- Granting Syria self-administration, as well as Iraq.
- Making the Sharifate of Hussein in the Hijaz hereditary and exclusive to his family, as it had been during the reign of Sultan Selim I.

These demands were either similar to or less than the promises Sharif Hussein had received from the British.

Sharif Hussein's letter was met with mockery and threats from the Unionist government, which threatened to kill Prince Faisal in Damascus and Prince Ali in Medina, sending this

message to their father, Sharif Hussein, who replied, "Do as you wish". ^{[15] [16] [17] [18] [19]}

This occurred during the complete absence of the Caliph, who was only seen during Eid and Friday prayers. The position of the Caliph in the preceding decades had become largely symbolic, with its occupant's role limited to approving appointments and surviving palace conspiracies and assassination attempts. ^{[20] [21] [22]}

The Revolution and the Capture of Damascus

Prince Faisal was allowed to return to Medina on the condition that he would gather the tribal leaders to fight the British. Prince Ali was requested to leave the city under the pretext that he was not in harmony with the governor. ^{[23] [24]}

Upon Prince Faisal's arrival, he and his brother, Prince Ali, left Medina under the guise of bidding farewell. When they reached Bir al-Mashi, outside Medina, Prince Ali sent a final ultimatum to Jamal Pasha, warning of war if the Arab demands presented by Sharif Hussein were not met within 24 hours. Within hours, the railway tracks were blown up, supply lines were cut, and the shots of the revolution echoed throughout the Hijaz. The revolution was officially declared the following day, June 10, 1916. ^{[25] [26]}

Prince Sharif Faisal was appointed as the commander of the Northern Army (King Faisal I bin Hussein - King of Syria and later King of Iraq), while Prince Sharif Ali was given the command of the Southern Army (King Ali bin Hussein - the last King of the Hijaz). The Ottoman garrison in Mecca fell, and the Ottoman army in Ta'if surrendered to the Eastern Army led by Prince Sharif Abdullah (King Abdullah bin Hussein - founder of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan). ^[27]

The military campaigns and fighting continued for more than two years, with the British and Arabs fighting against the Ottomans and Germans, racing to reach Damascus. The vanguard of the Allied armies arrived in the evening of October 1, and they entered Damascus with little resistance, as the Ottomans and Germans withdrew after detonating ammunition stores. The victorious armies officially entered Damascus on October 2, 1918, with a joint military parade of Arab and Australian cavalry celebrating the victory in the streets of Damascus. ^{[28] [29] [30] [31]}

Chapter Four

Photographs of the Capture of Damascus



Australian Light cavalry heading towards Damascus after the Battle of Jenin ^[1]



The Australian cavalry brigade heading towards Damascus after the Battle of Jenin. During this battle, the cavalry division attacked and captured the city of Jenin, forcing the Ottoman and German armies to retreat towards Damascus.^[2]



Australian Light cavalry heading towards Damascus after the Battle of Jenin ^[3]



The British Army convoy on its way to Damascus. ^[4]



The British Army convoy on its way to Damascus. ^[5]



One of the British Army infantry battalions on its way to Damascus. ^[6]



The British Army convoy traveling towards Damascus. ^[7]



An infantryman of the Indian Brigade and the British Army convoy on their way to Damascus. ^[8]



The Indian Brigade within the British Army convoy heading to Damascus. ^[9]



Indian infantry passing a destroyed cart on their way to Damascus. ^[10]



The British Army convoy heading towards Damascus. ^[11]



The British Army convoy heading towards Damascus. ^[12]



Australian Light cavalry heading towards Damascus. ^[13]



The British Army on its way to Damascus. ^[14]



The Australian cavalry brigade heading towards Damascus. ^[15]



The partially destroyed "Banat Yakoub" Bridge, which was damaged by the Ottoman forces during their retreat, with some Indian infantrymen visible in the picture. ^[16]



British cavalry divisions in a town on the road to Damascus. ^[17]



Thousands of Ottoman prisoners in the hands of the British Army. ^[18]



The British Army convoy heading towards Damascus. ^[19]



The British Army convoy heading towards Damascus. ^[20]



A group of Ottoman infantry prisoners. ^[21]



The British Army convoy heading towards Damascus. ^[22]



Cannons and bodies on the road to Damascus. ^[23]



Thousands of Ottoman prisoners in the hands of the British Army. ^[24]



Thousands of Ottoman prisoners in the hands of the British Army. ^[25]



Thousands of Ottoman prisoners in the hands of the British Army. ^[26]



A group of Ottoman cavalry prisoners resting under the shades of their horses. ^[27]



Thousands of Ottoman prisoners in the hands of the British Army. ^[28]



Thousands of Ottoman prisoners in the hands of the British Army. ^[29]



Thousands of Ottoman prisoners in the hands of the British Army. ^[30]



Thousands of Ottoman prisoners in the hands of the British Army. ^[31]



Thousands of Ottoman prisoners in the hands of the British Army. ^[32]



Cavalry of the Great Arab Revolt Army ("Northern Army") in the victory parade in Damascus. ^[33]



A group of Allied forces in Damascus, including cavalry from the Great Arab Revolt Army, British soldiers, and local residents, with Mount Qasioun in the background. ^[34]



Cavalry of the Arab Army "Northern Army" in the victory parade in the streets of Damascus. ^[35]



Cavalry of the Arab Army "Northern Army" in the victory parade in the streets of Damascus ^[36]



The people of Damascus welcoming the Allied forces in the streets of Damascus. ^[37]



Australian cavalry in the victory parade in the streets of Damascus, led by Lieutenant General Sir Henry Chauvel. ^[38]



Australian cavalry in the victory parade in the streets of Damascus, led by Lieutenant General Sir Henry Chauvel ^[39]



A picture of the Dummar station on the outskirts of Damascus, showing a destroyed Ottoman military convoy that was attacked while trying to withdraw under the cover of darkness on the night of Damascus' capture. ^[40]



Some destroyed carts and Ottoman soldiers' bodies near Dummar station on the outskirts of Damascus. ^[41]



Some destroyed carts near Dummar station on the outskirts of Damascus. ^[42]



Two dead Ottoman soldiers near Dummar station on the outskirts of Damascus. ^[43]



A part of the destroyed military convoy near Dummar station on the outskirts of Damascus. ^[44]



Some destroyed carts and Ottoman soldiers' bodies near Dummar station on the outskirts of Damascus. ^[45]



One of the wounded Ottoman soldiers and Australian cavalry in the city of Damascus. ^[46]



Lieutenant Dinning sitting behind his driver next to a soldier in a German war booty vehicle. ^[47]

“ If you will climb into the fringe of Salhiyeh you will see the curious shape of Damascus—a jagged comet-form, all the angles and serrations of the brown tail defined with unnatural clearness by the depth of the green about it. In the amorphous head are a few minarets, like jewels. ... In Damascus the city’s flat brownness is just relieved by them.

When we came to Damascus it was drought-stricken. Soon after it rained torrentially for a day. Then the sun shone and drew from the city such colour as we never dreamed was there. Nor had we dreamed that the trees were dusty, so green they seemed after the southern country. But, washed, they helped to throw up the wonderful colour of “that great city.”

I believe the beauty of colour in Damascus lies in extreme age—in the mellowing of age. ... The intense antiquity of the city —of every fragment of it— comes to you impressively. You feel the age of it as you pace every yard of it’s alleys. ...

There is a beauty in every foot of it. That is the way to express it - in every foot.^[48] ”

Lieutenant Hector Dinning

Chapter Five

Paintings of The Capture of Damascus



The Silk Bazaar (Market) in Damascus. ^[1]



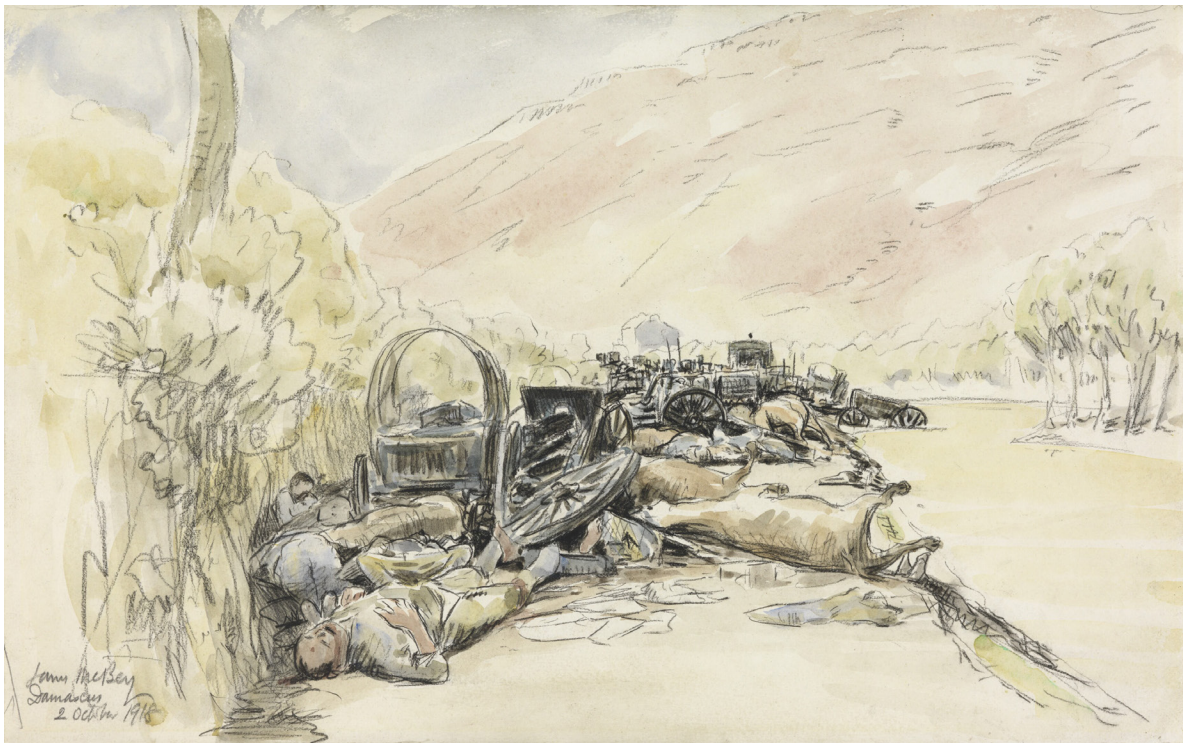
Two Australian Light cavalry on their horses in Damascus. ^[2]



A lively scene in front of the headquarters of the Great Arab Revolt Army "Northern Army" in Damascus. ^[3]



A division of Australian cavalry enters Damascus via Beirut road. ^[4]



A destroyed Ottoman convoy near Dummar station on the outskirts of Damascus. ^[5]



Australian soldiers buying grapes and bread from civilians. ^[6]



Australian Light cavalry resting on the outskirts of Damascus. ^[7]



Australian soldiers leaving Quneitra towards Damascus, with Mount Hermon visible in the background. ^[8]



A division of the Indian Brigade fetching water at Jacob's Bridge. ^[9]



The 14th Australian Cavalry Regiment camp, located nine miles from Damascus ^[10]



A Fighting Prince Muhammad Ali Moayyed Al Din, aged 65. ^[11]



The personal guard of Prince Sharif Faisal. ^[12]



James McBey^[13]



Lawrence of Arabia in Damascus. ^[14]

“ I turned to (Officer) Stirling and muttered “Damascus is burning”, sick to think of the great town in ashes as the price of freedom.

When dawn came we drove to the head of the ridge, which stood over the oasis of the city, afraid to look north for the ruins we expected: but, instead of ruins, the silent gardens stood blurred green with river mist, in whose setting shimmered the city, beautiful as ever, like a pearl in the morning sun.^[15] ”

*Colonel Thomas Edward Lawrence,
Known as “Lawrence of Arabia”*

Chapter Six

King Faisal I

King Faisal I was born on May 20, 1885, in Mecca. His father was Sharif Hussein bin Ali (1853-1931), the “father of kings,” and his mother was Sharifa Abdiya bint Abdullah, who passed away a year after his birth in 1886. At the age of six, in accordance with the old Arab customs, his father sent him to the desert, to the village of Al-Rihab east of Mecca, where he learned horsemanship, classical Arabic, traditional customs, shooting, and sword fighting. There, he experienced the harshness of Bedouin life, which made him stronger and more resilient.^{[1] [2]}

In 1896, Prince Faisal, along with his brothers, traveled to Istanbul, the capital of the Ottoman Empire, aboard a ship named “Ez Aldeen” to join their father, who had been appointed a member of the Imperial Consultative Council. They studied at the Sultan’s expense in a special school for the children of sultans and high-ranking state officials. There, they learned literature, modern sciences, military studies, as well as Turkish, English, and French languages, in addition to Ottoman protocol and royal ceremonies.^{[3] [4]} Prince Faisal was appointed as the private secretary to Sultan Abdulhamid II for six years. He returned to Mecca in 1909 after his father was appointed Emir of the Hijaz. He, along with his brothers, was entrusted by his father with guarding the pilgrimage routes from thieves and bandits. Later, he was appointed the commander of the Arab military units to discipline the tribes that rebelled against the Ottomans.^{[5] [6]}

He moved to Istanbul after being appointed a member of the Imperial Consultative Council and remained in constant travel between Istanbul, the Hijaz, and Damascus. He was in communication with Arab liberation movements, supporting them, and played roles as a diplomat, ambassador, and military leader. He led military campaigns against the Idrisi rebellion in Asir and achieved victory, proving his military competence and leadership ability. He gained the admiration of the tribes, and their sheikhs and leaders loved him.^[7] It was said of him, “Prince Faisal is brave and cunning, adept at managing the Bedouins—he can stir them up against his father.”^[8]

Prince Faisal in the Great Arab Revolt

Prince Faisal returned to Medina after the execution of the Arab nationalists to meet with Prince Ali, as mentioned earlier. Together, they issued the final ultimatum to the Unionist government. The first shots of the Great Arab Revolt were fired from Sharif Hussein bin Ali’s rifle in Mecca from the balcony of his palace, aimed at the Ajyad Fortress, the Ottoman army’s headquarters, marking the declaration of the revolution. Fires were set on the mountains of Mecca, and the Arabs began attacking Ottoman barracks throughout the Hijaz. This occurred on June 10, 1916.^[9]

Prince Faisal was entrusted with the task of leading the Northern Army, which initially comprised several thousand soldiers, most of them from the tribes of Medina. This army

later became the largest, most active, and best-equipped force of the Arab Revolt, representing the right flank and the eastern shield of the Allied forces.^{[10] [11]}

Prince Faisal marched the army north, gathering volunteers, and the tribes pledged allegiance to the revolution. Wherever he went, he reconciled between the tribes, resolved disputes, paid off debts for the indebted, and acted as a judge in conflicts. He would not leave a place until he had settled all matters.^[12]

Prince Faisal continued his advance northward for two years, achieving significant military victories over the Ottomans and Germans, moving from one triumph to another, steadily heading toward Damascus.^[13] This was despite the British hesitation in providing the necessary military support for the Arab army,^[14] largely due to pressure from France. France was concerned about the growing power of the Arab prince, as it did not align with its colonial interests or its share of the Sykes-Picot Agreement, and its evident animosity toward the Arabs and their movement.^[15]

The strength of the Arab army grew with the increasing number of volunteers from the liberated areas, as well as defectors from the Ottoman army, both officers and soldiers, who joined the revolutionary forces under the Arab banner. Many of them would sometimes flee from the Ottoman army to the Arab army under fire in the midst of battle.^[16] The number of fighters in the Arab army eventually reached 70,000 soldiers.^[17]

When Prince Faisal arrived in Daraa, he sent a message to the residents inviting them to join the revolution. The entire Hauran region, with all its villages, the Bedouin tribes, and the Druze mountain clans led by Sultan Pasha al-Atrash, rose to support the cause. The battles against the Ottomans intensified until their surrender. Thousands of Ottoman soldiers were captured, and Prince Faisal handed them over to the British due to the inability to provide them with supplies.^[18] These prisoners are likely the same ones captured in the photographs taken by James McBey, who wrote in his handwritten memoirs, "Thousands upon thousands of prisoners" before reaching Damascus.

Prince Faisal entered Damascus on October 3, 1918, like the great Arab conquerors of old, riding his white horse, surrounded by tribal leaders amidst a massive crowd of Damascenes cheering and clapping for him. The procession began from the south of Damascus, passing through the Midan district, in an unparalleled atmosphere of joy. Flags and flowers were raised everywhere, and the air was filled with Islamic chants of and victory songs.^{[19] [20] [21] [22]}

The Arab Government in Damascus

Prince Faisal assumed power in Syria and began working on establishing a national government to manage the country's affairs. At the time, Prince Faisal was still a commander within the Allied forces, under the leadership of General Allenby. He temporarily took control of Syria as one of the newly conquered military zones. The Levant was divided into

three military regions in preparation for the peace conference, which the British government saw as fulfilling its commitments to France under the Sykes-Picot Agreement, while also addressing Arab demands outlined in the McMahon Correspondence..^[23]

Despite Prince Faisal's brilliance as a military leader, he had no prior experience in politics and its intricacies,^[24] He was surrounded by a group of young revolutionary politicians, full of enthusiasm but lacking in experience,^{[25][26]} along with remnants of military officers returning from the Ottoman Empire. These officers began to convince Prince Faisal to disband the Arab army, citing reasons such as the fact that the army was not made up of indigenous Syrians, that its units were a mismatched mix, and that the army was accustomed to guerrilla warfare, which was unsuitable for conventional state warfare. They argued that it would be better to rebuild a new army.^[27] As a result, Syria was left without a regular army or seasoned political leadership. Meanwhile, the French continued to send warships and land military forces on the shores of Lebanon and Syria.^[28]

The French did not stop at this point; they had both secret and public connections with certain officers, as well as a number of politicians, notables, elites, and religious figures from various regions and social strata in Syria and Lebanon. Some of these individuals held sensitive positions or wielded significant influence. Prince Faisal recounts the events occurring in areas under French influence (the French military zone - the coasts of Syria and Lebanon):

"My government was informed of the French intelligence operations with the Druze, and we knew the amounts France paid to the Druze volunteers to fight the Shiites in Jabal Amil. We also learned of the sums given to the Maronites to fight the Druze in Lebanon. France paid the Circassians to fight the Aryans in Al-Hawla, and the Ismailis were paid to fight the Alawites in Baniyas. The Alawites were also paid to attack Islamic villages and burn them in Latakia. Whenever such crimes occurred in these areas, we did not see any effort from the French side to search for the criminals. All that happened was that the French would burn the nearest village, seize its cattle, and leave the residents in unimaginable misery and hardship."^[29]

Britain convinced its ally, Prince Faisal, of the necessity of engaging in diplomatic talks with the French. They urged him to seek an understanding with the French government, explaining that the British could not do much due to the agreements and treaties with their allies and that British forces would eventually leave Syria. They also persuaded him to attend the Paris Peace Conference. However, Prince Faisal was acting on the recommendation of his father, King Hussein, to negotiate exclusively with the British government.^[30]

British Prime Minister Lloyd George proposed to Prince Faisal that he encourage the people of Syria and Lebanon to call for British assistance and to support a British mandate instead of a French one. After the Syrians expressed this desire to the referendum com-

mittee, France was forced to negotiate with Britain. As a result, France conceded Mosul and agreed to make Palestine a British mandate instead of an international trusteeship, in exchange for ignoring the Syrians' wishes. ^[31] ^[32] ^[33]

The dream of the Syrians to gain British protection was lost, and Syria was left alone to face the growing power of France, which continued to amass its armies and exert influence over the western coast, becoming an overwhelmingly powerful force, as acknowledged by the Chief of Staff of the Arab Army, Yasin al-Hashimi. ^[34] The humble resistance efforts led by Prince Faisal failed, and, on the contrary, they only increased the French resentment toward him. ^[35]

The Declaration of Independence & The Battle of Maysalun

On March 8, 1920, Syria's independence was declared de facto, and Prince Faisal was crowned as its king. The preparations for the royal ceremonies were spontaneous, and there was no throne worthy of a king. In response, Abu al-Khair al-Farra volunteered to bring a luxurious Damascene chair, decorated with Nacre and ivory from his own home, which was then used as the throne for their new king. ^[36]

The relationship between France and the Arabs grew more tense after the declaration of independence. France prohibited the mention of King Faisal's name in mosques, and armed revolts erupted in areas directly controlled by the French army, particularly in Jabal Amil, the Alawite mountains, and Antioch, fueled by nationalist fervor. ^[37]

General Gouraud began his military advance on July 12, 1920, determined to remove King Faisal and his Damascene throne. He sent his famous ultimatum to the Arab government on July 14, with several demands, the most important being the acceptance of the French mandate and the dissolution of the army. Despite the Arab government's agreement to France's demands and its beginning efforts to disband the army and order the withdrawal of military units, the French forces continued to advance toward Damascus. Reports began coming in from the retreating military units that the French were advancing behind them. ^[38] General Gouraud claimed that the approval telegram was delayed, even though the telegram had arrived six hours before the deadline expired. ^[39]^[40]

Damascus was engulfed in anger, and a call for jihad was proclaimed from the minarets to defend the honor of the Syrian kingdom. The enthusiastic youth of Damascus rushed to the trains, accompanied by the remnants of the army, heading toward the Maysalun Valley. Among them was my Great uncle, Hamdi bin Hamoud AlSubainy, the brother of my Great grandfather, who was only sixteen years old at the time. The Arab army was led by Minister of War, Yusuf al-Azma, who refused to surrender his country and king without a dignified fight ^[41]

The battle began on the morning of July 25, 1920, in the Maysalun Valley, with artillery exchanges between the two sides. However, it quickly became apparent that the two forces were not evenly matched, and the Arab army's plans began to fail one after another. Betrayals were uncovered, and the intensity of the air raids and artillery strikes increased. The battle lasted only a few hours, ending with the fall of Minister of War Yusuf Al-Azma, who was killed by a tank shell in the heart of the battle. ^[42] As for my great uncle, he returned safely via the mountains of Damascus and lived for ninety years to tell the story.

King Faisal left Damascus after receiving an official letter from the French, demanding that he leave Damascus for the Hijaz with his family and entourage. The king had no choice but to comply in order to spare Damascus from street warfare. ^[43] He traveled by train to Daraa, where another letter arrived, instructing him not to remain there. The local residents were threatened through leaflets dropped from airplanes, warning that they would be bombed unless they expelled King Faisal. ^[44] He then left for Haifa, and from there, he traveled by train to Port Said, where he boarded a ship bound for Italy. He stayed there for several months, engaged in preliminary negotiations and discussions with the British.

King Faisal I, King of Iraq

The British began to turn King Faisal's attention toward the throne of Iraq, a position they failed to contain or fully control. They promised to support him, but at first, he was hesitant and uncertain about these promises. ^[45] Eventually, he agreed on the condition that he would not officially recognize the mandate and, instead, would accept a treaty that safeguarded British interests. Another condition was that he would only go to Iraq if the Iraqis requested him, and he would not take the throne without a popular vote showing the Iraqis' desire for him to be crowned as their king. ^[46]

King Faisal left Britain at the end of March, traveling to Cairo and then to the Hijaz to meet his father. Afterward, he traveled to Basra in Iraq, where he was officially elected as king. He was crowned on August 23, 1921. ^{[47][48]}

King Faisal ruled Iraq with integrity and dedication for a decade, a period filled with challenges and storms that took a toll on his health, leading to periods of illness. He was forced to travel regularly for rest and treatment in Switzerland. ^[49] During one of these therapeutic visits, on September 8, 1933, he passed away from a heart attack at the age of 49, leaving behind a legacy of military glory and national heroism. His body was returned to Haifa, where it was greeted by large crowds. His remains were then flown, accompanied by a squadron of Iraqi aircraft, to Baghdad, where tens of thousands of Arabs ^[50] from different nations gathered to bid farewell to the symbol of the Great Arab Revolt, King Faisal bin Hussein. His funeral procession led to the royal palace, and he was buried in the royal tombs in Al-Azamiyah, Baghdad.



King Faisal I in Damascus ^[51]

“ Gentlemen! We do not ask Europe to grant us something that we do not have a right to. Rather, we ask it to acknowledge our clear right, which has been recognized, as a living nation that seeks a free life and complete independence, wishing to live with other respected nations in full loyalty and sincere love. Our future policy will be one of peace and reconciliation, based on mutual trust and reciprocal benefits. In one word: a policy that aligns with the interests of the nation and the benefit of universal peace. The Arabs do not shy away from exchanging benefits with civilized nations. They do not reject the friendship of those who seek their friendship, provided that this does not affect their dignity or compromise their full political independence. ^[52] ”

King Faisal I

Appendix

Marguerite McBey ^[1] ^[2] ^[3] ^[4]

I wanted to add an appendix to the research titled “Marguerite McBey”, wife of artist James McBey, due to her generous donation of her husband’s works and memorabilia to the museum in the city of Aberdeen, the capital of his birthplace, Aberdeenshire, Scotland. Her donation of photographs to the museum and their preservation there is the reason for the existence of this research.

Marguerite Loeb was born in Philadelphia, USA, on April 30, 1905, in the heart of spring, to a wealthy and conservative Jewish family. Her father, Adolf Loeb, was born in Grönstadt, Germany (1871-1930), and her mother, Hortense Huntsberry, was born in Ohio, USA (1882-1955) ^[5]

She grew up in the German neighborhood (Germantown) on Wissahickon Avenue in Philadelphia, where she received a private education. She spent her summer vacations at the Accomac Camp for religious education for girls in Maine, USA. ^[6] Later, her father sent her to Switzerland to complete her education, after which she moved to a specialized school called the “School of Decorative Arts and Art Workshops for Girls” in Paris, which ceased to exist in the 1980s. ^[7] There, she learned bookbinding and gilding. During a vacation on the shores of the French city, she caught the eye of Austrian painter Oscar Kokoschka, who fell in love with her and proposed marriage, but her father rejected the proposal.

Marguerite returned to New York in 1925, where she trained in photography and later opened a bookbinding shop. She dedicated herself to her work, ensuring that each book came out like a work of art, which led to her works being exhibited in art galleries in New York and San Francisco. In 1929, she decided to return to Philadelphia and move her business there to be closer to her family.

During an event in New York, Marguerite met James McBey, and they fell in love. McBey spent the holiday with her family in Bermuda and proposed marriage to her. She agreed, and they secretly married before traveling together to London, where they stayed for a period. They then traveled to Spain and later to Morocco in 1932, where they made Morocco their primary residence, although they continued to visit Britain. In 1939, during a summer family visit to the United States, World War II broke out, and Marguerite was prevented from traveling abroad as the U.S. government seized her passport. They remained in the United States together. Marguerite was known for her beauty and charm and was named one of the most elegant women of 1940. Once World War II ended, they quickly packed their bags and returned eagerly to Morocco in 1945.

Marguerite fell in love with Morocco and spent most of her life there, enchanted by the country’s beauty, colors, nature, and the charm of the Moroccan people with their traditional clothing. Initially, she and her husband lived in a house they had purchased before the war, and later, they bought a house in western Tangier called “El Foolk” Marguerite

continued to live in “El Fook” after her husband’s death in 1959, never remarrying. She began practicing painting, a passion her husband had encouraged during his life. She painted in watercolors, and her artworks were well-received, being exhibited in Tangier, London, and New York.

Marguerite was socially active and made significant contributions to the community. Those visiting Tangier from abroad, particularly artists, politicians, and wealthy individuals, made a point of visiting Mrs. Marguerite. She loved entertaining guests, and she was last representative of the cosmopolitan group of Morocco.

What Mrs. Marguerite did by preserving her husband’s works and donating them to the museum is an exceptional act that deserves appreciation and respect. Many works of great scientists, thinkers, historians, and writers have been lost in the depths of history, or those that were sold at public auctions have disappeared into the palaces of the wealthy, denying the chance for others to see them, enjoy them, and benefit from them.

Her love, devotion, and appreciation for her husband were no less than her love for art and heritage. It was as though she had not only married a world-renowned artist but had married art itself. She devoted her life and abilities to supporting museums, charity work, and preserving heritage. In addition to donating her husband’s artworks and unique collections to the Aberdeen Museum, she also contributed to the museum’s expansion by funding the James McBey Print Room and Library.^[8] Furthermore, she made generous financial donations to increase the museum’s collection of both past and future artworks. Her philanthropy did not stop at the Aberdeen Museum; she also donated a wide array of valuable jewelry and gold to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.^[9] She contributed to the Vogue Museum and the Houghton Library at Harvard University in the United States. Marguerite was one of the major contributors to the campaign for the reconstruction and restoration of the American Legation Museum in Tangier, protecting it from being sold^[10] as it is classified as a national historical landmark for the United States on foreign soil. Additionally, she helped establish the American Legation Museum in Tangier, enriching it by donating some of her husband’s works from Morocco, as well as some of her own paintings.^{[11] [12]} She also donated a large collection of books on Morocco and Tangier to its research library.^[13] Marguerite also contributed in building the American School in Tangier, donating both land and funds. After her passing, she entrusted the creation of a charitable endowment in her name in Aberdeen, Scotland, to support the city’s museum, promote knowledge and culture, protect heritage, and enrich the museum with the proceeds of the endowment, which still exists today.^[14]

She donated much and kept only a few of her husband’s paintings for herself, including two works he had painted during the early years of their marriage. The first painting depicts her wearing a traditional Moroccan dress, titled *Marguerite in Striped Robe*. The second, one of the most beautiful paintings James McBey ever created, is an oil painting titled *Marguerite Sleeping*. In this painting, Marguerite is shown peacefully asleep on a

simple blue couch with a yellow pillow, covered by an earthy-toned blanket. The story behind this painting (as I like to imagine) is that James spent the entire night watching his wife resting in tranquility, and he decided to paint her as a gift for her birthday. He then framed the painting in an ornate, carved wooden frame gilded with gold, and hung it alongside the first painting in one of the rooms of their London home, which was later featured in *Country Life* magazine.^[15] These two precious paintings were sold at public auction in 2021, twenty-two years after the death of the art patron, as part of a collection of paintings and other memorabilia.^[16]

Marguerite remained in Morocco for all those years, full of energy and vitality,^[17] until she moved to London in the final year or two of her life due to the need for medical care. She stayed in London until her passing on October 21, 1999.



Marguerite McBey^[18]

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